

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 6870

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, NI

SUBJECT: PRESIDENT NIXON'S LETTER TO GENERAL GOWON

REF: LAGOS 6809

SUMMARY: SPEAKING FOR GENERAL YAKUBU GOWON, MEA COMMISSIONER OKOI ARIKPO ORALLY CONVEYED ANSWER TO PRESIDENT'S LETTER. PROMISED A WRITTEN REPLY "IN DUE COURSE." OUR OWN PLANNING SHOULD PROCEED.

1. COMMISSIONER ARIKPO CORDIALLY RECEIVED ME EVENING OF AUGUST 22, MORE OR LESS AS SCHEDULED. AFTER EXCHANGE OF PLEASANTRIES, THE COMMISSIONER IMMEDIATELY CAME TO THE POINT, A VERBATIM STATEMENT OF WHICH IS MOST REVELATORY COMPLEX OF ATTITUDES AND MEA DISORIENTATION THAT RESTRAIN NORMAL DIPLOMATIC INTERCHANGE: "AS I TOLD YOU YESTERDAY, OCTOBER 6 IS THE DATE WE HAVE CHOSEN. WE WILL COME TO NEW YORK OCTOBER 4; THE GENERAL WILL ADDRESS THE UNGA OCTOBER 5, COME TO SEE THE PRESIDENT OCTOBER 6, AND LEAVE FOR LAGOS OCTOBER 7." I SAW THAT WE WERE IN FOR A LONG TALK.

2. POINTING OUT THAT HE HAD MADE NO SUCH STATEMENT TO ME YESTERDAY OR AT ANY OTHER TIME, I SAID THAT I COULD NOT DISCUSS A DATE WITH HIM AND THAT MY ONLY CONCERN WAS SECURING AN ANSWER TO THE LETTER. HAD THE COMMISSIONER HIMSELF READ THE LETTER AND NOTED THE HOPE FOR ARRANGING A MUTUALLY CONVENIENT TIME? YES, THE GENERAL HAD KINDLY FURNISHED HIM A PHOTOSTAT. "THERE MUST BE SOME CONFUSION," HE SAID AS HE ASKED TO LEAVE THE ROOM FOR A MOMENT.

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3. RETURNING SHORTLY WITH A DATE BOOK AND AFTER APPARENTLY MAKING A TELEPHONE CALL, HE PROFUSELY APOLOGIZED THAT PERMANENT SECRETARY YALLA HAD "FORGOTTEN" TO INFORM ME ABOUT THE "DATE WE HAVE CHOSEN." HE THEN REPEATED THE "CHOSEN" DATE, ONLY ADDING THIS TIME THAT THE VISIT TO WASHINGTON COULD BE FOR A DAY AND ONE-HALF. THE GENERAL WILL ADDRESS THE UNGA AT 11:00 AM FRIDAY, OCTOBER 5, AND WILL BE PREPARED TO LEAVE FOR WASHINGTON IMMEDIATELY THEREAFTER AND STAY THROUGH SATURDAY, OCTOBER 6. " THE GENERAL HOPES THAT THE PRESIDENT WILL BE ABLE TO TALK WITH HIM DURING THIS PERIOD," HE ADDED.

4. ONCE MORE I INDICATED THAT I COULD NOT DISCUSS EXACT TIMING AND THAT AN EARLY ANSWER TO THE LETTER WOULD TRIGGER THE SEARCH FOR A MUTUALLY CONVENIENT TIME. HE THEN ASSURED ME THAT HE SPOKE FOR GENERAL GOWON, THAT HE HAD JUST GIVEN ME THE ANSWER, AND THAT HE HOPED I WOULD CONVEY THE ANSWER TO WASHINGTON. I TOLD HIM THAT I WOULD RELAY THE CONVERSATION TO WASHINGTON BUT THAT A WRITTEN REPLY WAS STILL NECESSARY AND APPROPRIATE. HE AGREED: "WE WILL CERTAINLY TAKE CARE OF THE NICETIES IN DUE COURSE, BUT I HAVE GIVEN YOU THE REAL ANSWER."

5. COMMENT: IN THE NIGERIAN SYSTEM AND IN THE NIGERIAN VIEW, WE DO HAVE THE ANSWER, AS DIFFICULT AS WE MAY FIND ACCEPTING THIS MODUS OPERANDI. WE WILL RECEIVE A WRITTEN REPLY, BUT I CAN NOT PREDICT THE EXTENT OF "IN DUE COURSE." HAVING SCRUPULOUSLY PLAYED THE MEA PROCEDURAL GAME, I NOW FEEL FREE TO PRESS PRINCIPAL SECRETARY AHMADU TO PREPARE AND DISPATCH AN EARLY ANSWER. IF THE ANSWER IS TO BE DELIVERED BY NIGERIAN EMBASSY WASHINGTON, AS ELEMENTS IN MEA MAY INSIST, WE CAN EXPECT FURTHER DELAY.

6. WHILE TEMPORARILY AVOIDING ANY FORMAL REACTION TO ARIKPO'S "ANSWER," WE SHOULD PROCEED MAKE OUR OWN PRELIMINARY PLANS FOR AFTERNOON-EVENING OF OCTOBER 5 AND/OR ANY TIME(S) OCTOBER 6. IN ADDITION ARIKPO'S STATEMENT, WE HAVE OTHER EVIDENCE THESE DATES FIRM. IF FOR ANY REASON THESE DATES ARE UNSATISFACTORY FOR US, WE SHOULD OF COURSE INFORMALLY

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PASS THE WORD TO THE NIGERIANS.

7. I CAN NOT ACCOUNT FOR THE PUZZLING PERFORMANCE OF IYALLA. WHATEVER HAPPENED, HE DID NOT "FORGET" TO INFORM ME OF FMG PLANS. THERE MAY BE NO MORE INVOLVED THAN SHEER INEFFICIENCY, MALADROITNESS AND THE CROSSING OF WIRES. ON OTHER HAND, HE MAY HAVE SOUGHT TO CUT KOLADE IN ON MAJOR PLANNING BEFORE RETURN OF GARBA, GIVING UP AFTER DISCOVERING GOWON

DETERMINATION SETTLE A DATE AND THE NEED TO MOVE MORE RAPIDLY
THAN SLOW MEA OOOOOOOIT.

8. IN ALL OF THESE ABNORMAL PROCEEDING WE CAN FIND A
CONSOLATION: NO PLANNING IS EVER EASY IN LAGOS, BUT FINALLY
ORDER GROWS OUT OF CHAOS. THERE IS ALWAYS AT LEAST ONE
MORE NIGERIAN PHOENIX.
REINHARDT

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